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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 001947

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA (MAHER)  
STATE FOR S/CT (AMBASSADOR CRUMPTON)  
PENTAGON FOR OSD ISRAEL DESK OFFICER (ANDERSON)  
DIA FOR DHO-6  
NSC FOR DPNSA ABRAMS

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SUBJECT: ISRAELI DEFMIN PERETZ ON PALESTINIAN HUMANITARIAN  
ISSUES

Classified By: DCM Gene A. Cretz for reason 1.4 (b and d).

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SUMMARY  
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11. (C) New Israeli Defense Minister Amir Peretz told Ambassador Jones May 17 that he wants negotiations with the Palestinians to begin as soon as possible, and that PA President Abbas should be strengthened. He said that he has ordered that the Karni crossing remain open for traffic in both directions between Israel and the Gaza Strip as long as security conditions permit, and is considering allowing a limited number of West Bank workers access to Green-Line Israel. Peretz said that on May 21 he will submit a detailed proposal to the GOI to address Palestinian health care problems. At the Ambassador's request, Peretz said he will look to secure GOI acceptance of the customs protocol called for in the Agreement on Access and Movement (AMA), and fuel sales to the Palestinians for humanitarian purposes. Peretz's comments on terrorism, Iran and other security issues, the MDA and human trafficking are covered in septels.  
END SUMMARY.

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PERETZ TO PUSH TO RESOLVE HUMANITARIAN ISSUES  
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12. (C) Peretz said that, in his view, negotiations with the Palestinians, and efforts to strengthen Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmud Abbas, need to start as soon as possible. Unlike most of his senior Cabinet colleagues, Peretz characterized Abbas as "relevant" and noted that since Hamas took control of the PA, organizations that were formerly not beholden to Abbas now want to strengthen him and "keep him alive." Describing the official GOI position as an "intention to conduct negotiations with the Palestinians," Peretz said his own position is more firm: "We must recognize him as a legitimate partner for negotiations." He admitted that he is uncertain whether Abbas could secure passage of a referendum on the future status of a Palestinian state, and said this must be discussed later.

13. (C) Peretz told the Ambassador that earlier in the day, "after hearing the positions of all sides," he ordered that the Karni crossing between Israel and Gaza remain open for traffic in both directions as long as security conditions permit. He lamented the fact that Karni had been closed for much of the last three months, and promised to balance the security of the personnel working at the crossing with the Palestinians' humanitarian needs: "There are risks to this, but we need to stop the ferment on the Palestinian side."

14. (C) Peretz told the Ambassador that he is examining how far Israel can go in allowing West Bank workers into Green-Line Israel for employment. He said that last week he authorized the transit between the West Bank and Gaza of Palestinians working for international organizations. In response to the Ambassador's request, the DefMin said he will also consider whether Israel can allow Gazans to work in Green-Line Israel.

15. (C) Peretz said that on May 21, he plans to submit a detailed proposal to purchase equipment and medicines for Palestinian hospitals in order to address what he termed the Palestinian health care crisis. The DefMin said that he objects to paying salaries to Palestinian civil servants, but wants to help the Palestinian people.

16. (C) Responding to the Ambassador's request, Peretz said that he would look into ways to obtain GOI agreement to the customs protocol called for in the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA).

17. (C) In response to the Ambassador's request, Peretz said that he would look into the possibility of selling fuel to the Palestinians for humanitarian purposes, but cautioned that the issue is "complex" due to allegations of corruption

on the Palestinian side. He said that an agreement is being worked out that involves the Dor Energiya company and NIS 130 million from a Palestinian investment fund.

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JONES